

**Adrian Rațiu. The song *S-aștept?* [Shall I wait?]
with lyrics by Tudor Arghezi.
Stylistic and interpretative aspects**

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“If we did not have a soul, music would have created one for us.”
(Emil Cioran)

Abstract: One of the most erudite musicians of the 20th century, Adrian Rațiu, composer, teacher and musicologist trained in the atmosphere of the Bucharest Conservatory, but also in the summer courses in Darmstadt, consolidates his creative act on the idea of unity and balance of musical substance, thus determining, on a compositional level, a synthesis between free and rigorously organised structures. Adrian Rațiu succeeds – through the lied *S-aștept?* [Shall I Wait?] – in introducing us to the realm of Arghezi's profound and rich poetry, which has often been the seed of new musical masterpieces in the chamber style. The poem conveys the feeling of love, emotion, the excitement of waiting, of departure, fulfilment and frustration, in a stirring register of soul and language. The sound semiotics developed by the composer capitalises on the semantics of the lyrics written by a poet of the highest calibre, who was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature. A craftsman of the highest literary refinement, the poet finds the complementarity of his lyrics in a subtle heterophonic musical rendition, offering us a sensitive score. It is a tribute to the blacksmith in the garden of Mărțișor, stirred by constellations in whose contemplation he loses himself in thoughts and fundamental existential questions.

Keywords: Adrian Rațiu, *lied*, poetic text semantics, vocal interpretation, musical analysis.

One of the most erudite musicians of the 20th century, Adrian Rațiu, composer, teacher and musicologist trained at the Bucharest Conservatory and at the Darmstadt summer courses, consolidates his creative work on the idea of unity and balance in musical substance, thus achieving a synthesis between free and rigorously organised structures in his compositions.

Through his lied *S-aștept?* [Shall I Wait?], Adrian Rațiu succeeds in introducing us to the profound and rich poetry of Arghezi, which has often been the seed for new musical masterpieces in the chamber style.

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Suggestive from the very title, Tudor Arghezi's poem *S-aștept?* [Shall I Wait?] is a philosophical meditation. The poetic text is built on the structure of the fusion of the iambic suitor rhythm, starting from a serious meditative note, with paired rhymes (**aabb**), feminine (unaccented) endings in the first structure and masculine (accented) endings in the second structure, rendered graphically as follows:

***S-aștept?* [Shall I Wait?]**

Tudor Arghezi

I wait for life to come with its fullness (14)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 And wait for me from the horizon to me? (14)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 I wait in the cold night, listening for a sound(13)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 A friend without a name, a stranger and without a voice? (14)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 With wings to adore you in the moonlight (14)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 Would I expect to be returned to my former state? (14)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 I would expect the memory to try again (14)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 At the gate between the fields, I would wait for the spark (14)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 Lu-mi-ni-lor lost in dust and ashes? (13)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 No road leads straight to me anymore; (12)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 Barely a cart, a trail like smoke. (13)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 There is no door, no threshold, no palmar, (13)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 Only they are gathered together at night in a garden. (13)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 What should I expect to come and what should I understand, (12)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 When will time collapse completely? (13)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

Part of the volume *Frunze, Ritmuri* [Leaves, Rhythms, 1961], the poem conveys the feeling of love, emotion, the excitement of waiting, of departure, fulfilment and frustration, in a disturbing register of soul and language.

The verses capture the reader's attention through the power of metaphors (*asleep wings, lights lost in dust and ashes, life with full baskets, etc.*). The rhetorical question and anaphora (lines 1–3, 6–7) convey the anxiety, turmoil and doubt caused by futile waiting and the signs of the end, so that, at the end of the poem, resignation takes the place of doubt (*What should I wait for and what should I understand, / When time is collapsing all around me?*).

The poet states: “When language cannot directly reproduce sensation, it is aided by versification. Sensation strikes the word, and it opens the verse”¹.

The poem consists of 15 lines, in the form of a stanza, with complex rhyme (lines 1–8 and 12–15 contain paired rhyme, lines 9–11 contain monorhyme), with variable meter (12–13–14 syllables). There is a noticeable interweaving of iambic, trochaic, anapestic and amphibrachic rhythms. The rhetorical questions (5) make the text ambiguous. This stylistic device contributes greatly to opening up the text to multiple questions, interpretations and comments.

Beginning within the formal ABA structure – which ultimately develops a conclusion of temporality, thus highlighting the cyclical development of the inexorable passage of time, both poetically and musically the composer opens this first page of the lied using the insertion of clashing seconds and combinations of fourth-fifth chords, which induce a state of unease through sensitisation and dissonant overlaps. These same elements add tension and ambiguity to the melodic design, while also enhancing the semantic expressiveness of the poetic text. By beginning the phrase with the passing notes of the soprano voice, the composer tests the performer's technical abilities from the very first note. The technical and interpretative elaboration of this musical moment must take into account, as a primary starting point, the correct preparation and positioning of the sound in the resonant spaces, in order to prevent any risk of injustice, often encountered in the performance of these types of passages.

The image shows a musical score for the first page of the lied 'S-aștept?' by Adrian Rațiu. The score is in 3/4 time and features a soprano voice line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are in Romanian, Russian, German, and French. The music begins with a series of chords and moving lines, creating a sense of tension and ambiguity.

Fig. 1 Adrian Rațiu, *S-aștept?* [Shall I Wait?], ms. 3-8

¹ Nicolae Balotă (2012). *Drama cuvântului în opera lui Tudor Arghezi* [The Drama of Words in the Work of Tudor Arghezi], Editura EuroPress Group, București, p. 63.

S - aștept să vie viața cu coșurile pline

Module I *Waiting for life to come* (3-1-3-2-2) Module II *with full baskets* (2-4-1)

-segment from Mod I, with enharmonic elements

The repetition of the word “wait” outlines an intervallic elaboration from a soloistic perspective, from the descending diminished fourth (G-D#) infused with doubt, to the ascending sixth suggesting the return of ideas, of shoots accompanied by the sound of their return. The second “S-aștept?” (Shall I Wait?), (the second of the poisonous laurels) carries the doubt of poetic thought, holder of the light that has faded into the dust of oblivion. The rhythm completes the musical picture by alternating between binary and ternary rhythms, in a fairly fast tempo – *Allegretto* – creating the impression of an asymmetrical *aksak* rhythm, which reveals – through its pulsating balance with stops on harmonic pedals – the composer's reflection on Balkan spatiality. The melodic design follows the idea of the poem, emphasising the note of malice and the complementarity between the pianistic and vocal discourse (see the intervals associated with the words *full, gifts, empty, name*).

pli - ne da - ruri , goa - lă nu - me ,

The appearance of B becomes contrasting and full of mystery. Keeping the melodic design based on intervals in the first section (b), Adrian Rațiu allows the word to dominate. Thus, he uses the musicality of the words, to which he adds their suggestion, to create, clothe and facilitate the voice's colouristic rendering of the widest possible timbral spectrum, intended to bring the words to life and weave - among the vital filigrees of music - the most authentic projections of sound images.

p *3* *3*

Cu a - ripi a - dor - mi - te în di - mi - nea - ța lu - nii

Мне ждать ли лун - ным у - тром двух лас - то - чек при - ве - та

Und soll ich früh im Mond - licht auf Mau - er - schwal - ben war - ten,

At - ten - dre sous la lu - ne, fri - Teux, que l'hi - ron - dol - le

With wea - ry slee - py wing beats, re - turn - ing in the morn - ing

p *3*

Fig. 2 Adrian Rațiu, *S-aștept?* [Shall I Wait?], ms. 22-26

The rendering of vocal discourse in *piano* is the first step in building a meaningful musical dynamic, in perfect accordance with the composer's requirements and, implicitly, with those of the text. What is very important to pursue in creating the atmosphere is to reduce the voice to the minimum possible sound, which allows the performer to keep intact the penetrating power and timbre of the sound, obtained by concentrating the voice in the resonators, on a laryngeal lightness energetically supported by the respiratory muscles. Due to the presence of intervallic vocal movement, this moment must be prepared in a very careful and intelligent way, through effective and anticipatory thinking, which ensures psychological comfort, perfect energy and vocal dosage, but also vocal malleability in compliance with technical rigour.

The mysterious atmosphere continues to develop in the second section of B (b1), abandoning the intervallic progression in favour of the scalar one, with the role of intensifying the poetic meaning *I wait, perhaps, for the memory to try its key again / At the gate between the daffodils?* and to render everything in a much more intimate, internalised experience, representing the generative factor of the construction of the climax of this part, of *Lights lost in dust and ashes?*

The image shows a musical score for a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staff. The score is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The vocal line is marked 'piu f' and 'dim.' with dynamics ranging from 'mf' to 'dim.'. The piano accompaniment is marked 'piu f' and 'dim.' with dynamics ranging from 'mf' to 'dim.'. The lyrics are in Romanian and English.

Lu -	mi - ni -	lor pier -	du - te	in	pul -	be -	re si	scrum?
Ho -	ma -	poz or -	ury -	mes -	urax,	B so -	ay y -	wea -
Aur	ei -	nem to -	ten Stern,	der	Staub	und	A -	sche
Des	sour -	ces de	lu -	miè -	re	gi -	sant	dans
Sez	long	for -	got -	ten	lost	lights	en -	gulfed
							in	dust
							and	and
								ash?

Fig. 3 Adrian Rațiu, *S-aștept?* [Shall I Wait?], ms. 39-43

Time, humanity's relentless and invincible enemy, does not spare even the poet himself. The lights are lost in *dust and ashes*, the roads pass through fog, and a deep sense of abandonment replaces the joy and jubilation of yesteryear.

The alternation between binary and ternary facilitates this accumulation of tension, which is then resolved by an unleashing of dynamics in shades of *forte*, requiring the soloist to add extra interpretative and vocal drama to convey the moment accurately. Moderate voice coverage with adequate respiratory and muscular support is very important for technically correct execution. This process provides the voice with the benefit of a natural protection mechanism, thus avoiding overstraining, singing that turns into screaming and, inevitably, open emission. However, the performer must also be aware of the danger of *falling*

into the other vocal extreme, covering the sound too much and thus straining the voice.

The structural-semantic duality of the piano discourse intensifies the vocal one – with the reprise of A – ending in a specifically Romanian *parlando-rubato*, thus completing a primordial element in the free reception of the essence.

Fig. 4 Adrian Rațiu, *S-aștept?* [Shall I Wait?], ms. 57-64

Bringing the clashes of seconds for the last time, the voice culminates in a high note, while the piano resolves, in mirror image, the idea of collapse, through an explosion of sevenths complementary to the vocal seconds.

“Poetry that is corseted, rhythmic, rhymed, versified: caught in *convention*, geometrically crystallised, compressed above all, stirs up and squeezes out sensations, memories, emotions. *The 'corset' has an impulsive role.*”²

As literary critic Eugen Simion remarks, “what is interesting to note here and in other verses is the sensation of heavy materiality left by poems permeated with desolation and loneliness. It is a common technique in Arghezi's work and stems from a kind of compensation, a revenge of the imagination”.

The deepest lyricism we find in the volumes *Frunze*, *Poeme noi*, *Cadențe* is nourished by the indistinct feeling of waiting, of watching, “at dusk”.

Contemplation is intertwined with the fear of nothingness.

The sound semiotics developed by the composer capitalises on the semantics of the lyrics written by a leading poet, who was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature. A craftsman of the highest literary refinement, the poet finds the complementarity of his lyrics in a subtle heterophonic musical rendition, offering us a page of authentic Romanian feeling. It is a tribute to the blacksmith in the garden of Mărtișor, stirred by constellations in whose contemplation he loses himself in thoughts and fundamental existential questions.

² Eugen Simion (1981). *Tudor Arghezi – Cel cu toate în veac nepotrivit* [Tudor Arghezi – The one who is always out of place], Editura Minerva, București, p. 19.

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